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A report of a questionnaire-survey directed to student personnel administrators in 200 institutions of higher education to elicit information on practices in responding to inquiries concerning a former student's character and conduct while attending the institution. In constructing the questionnaire, interviews were held with student personnel administrators and other staff at 11 institutions and with business, industrial, and government officers. The questionnaire consisted of seven situational cases which approximated the actual task involved in dealing with typical inquiries. The respondent was asked to deal with each case as he would in his own professional situation and to indicate whether his answers were based on his own judgments or on policies in effect in his office or institution. One hundred usable questionnaires were returned (a 50-percent return). The report presents tabulations of responses to questions based on three of the seven cases; the three cases and the related questions are reproduced in the report.

The data obtained through the questionnaire and interviews provided a basis for the identification of issues with respect to the college's task in dealing with inquiries. These issues and their implications are presented in the form of recommended practices to aid institutions in assessing their own procedures and policies.

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Dirck W. Brown

INTERPRETING THE COLLEGE STUDENT TO PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYERS, GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, AND GRADUATE SCHOOLS

Introduction

Each week colleges and universities are called upon to answer written and verbal inquiries seeking information about their students. These inquiries are directed to student personnel administrators and other staff, and they may come from numerous offices and agencies outside the collegiate community, such as the F. B. I., business firms, educational foundations, or simply from other colleges and universities. Typical of the inquiries received is the following addressed to a Dean of Students from the personnel officer of a business firm:

> We shall appreciate it if you give us your opinion of _____, particularly as to his moral character, ability, willingness to work and honesty. . . we will treat your reply confidentially.

Survey of Current Practices

A study of existing practices for dealing with inquiries in selected colleges and universities was undertaken in the spring of 1958 to provide data for the identification of issues and problems regarding these practices. The need to identify actual practices was considered important in relation to such questions as: What rationale is employed by collegiate administrators in dealing with inquiries? How can the college resolve its complex obligation to the agency requesting information, to the student, and to the institutional community? Upon what basis does the administrative officer determine which aspects of the student's record are "public information" and which are "private information"? Are practices for dealing with inquiries affected by the fact that some students are well known to the staff and other students are not known, with little, if any, available information?

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Interviews to identify practices and to determine the content of typical inquiries were held with student personnel administrators and other staff at 11 institutions. Also, interviews were conducted with business, industrial, and governmental officers as to the type and use of the student information they request. The results of these interviews provided the basis for a questionnaire addressed to Deans of Students, Deans of Men, Deans of Women, and other staff in 200 collegiate institutions throughout the country.

The questionnaire consisted of seven situational cases which approximated the actual task involved in dealing with typical inquiries. Each case contained selected information about a fictitious student, followed by an inquiry pertaining to that student. The cases included an inquiry from a business firm seeking information about a student who had been hostile to participating in extra curricular activities; an inquiry from a prospective employer asking about the character of a student who had allegedly created disturbances in his residence hall; a personal inquiry from an F. B. I. agent regarding a student who had participated in a student group organized to discuss Marxist ideology; an employment inquiry about an engineering student with emotional difficulties; an inquiry from another college requesting specific information about "acts of dishonesty" with respect to a student who had previously been disciplined for cheating; and an inquiry from a government intelligence agency regarding the past activity of a woman who had graduated eight years prior to the inquiry.

The respondent was asked to deal with each case as he would in his own professional situation and to indicate whether his answers were based on his own judgments or on policies in effect in his office or institution. One hundred usable questionnaires were returned or 50 per cent of those sent. The characteristics of the institutions participating in the study are shown in Table I.

TABLE I

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF 94 COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES FROM WHICH 100 QUESTIONNAIRES WERE RECEIVED[a]

University	43
College of Liberal Arts	26
Teachers College	10
Technological Institute	9
Teachers College and College of Liberal Arts	6
	94[b]
Coeducational	86
Male	5
Female	3
	94
State Control	42
Private Control--Nonsectarian	26
Private Control--Religious Affiliation	22
Municipal Control	3
Private and State Control	1
	94

[a]Three staff members replied from one institution; two staff members replied from each of three other institutions.

[b]The ninety-four institutions were classified according to the following source: Mary Irwin (ed.), American Universities and Colleges (sixth edition; Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education, 1952).

To illustrate the questionnaire cases, the following cases are reported in detail:

Case of Ted and June

> Ted and June have been "going steady" ever since they entered your institution three years ago, when they were both 18 years of age. You know Ted from his membership on the inter-fraternity council and, while you have seen Ted and June together at college social functions, you have not come to know June. Both Ted and June, scholastically, rank in the upper quarter of their class.
>
> Much to your surprise, the Dean of Women comes to you several days before the end of their junior year to tell you that June and Ted have "broken up". She then tells you that June is withdrawing from college after her final exams, and June has confided that Ted is the father of the baby she is expecting in six months. The Dean of Women further

tells you that Ted is transferring to another college to complete his degree and that, while he admits responsibility for the situation, he "refuses to have anything more to do with June". You ask the Dean to make a note of this in her confidential files and you do the same. You send a message to Ted asking him to see you, but learn that he has finished his exams and left the campus.

Four weeks after the close of the examination period you receive a written inquiry from the college to which Ted is transferring for his senior year. The inquiry states: "The above named student, who has attended your institution, is applying to us for transfer. We would appreciate your appraisal of the items which follow. The information furnished will be held in strict confidence, and adverse criticism will not necessarily prejudice the admission of the applicant".

One of the questions asked is: "To your knowledge, has the applicant been involved in sexual irregularities?"

The respondent was asked to answer the following questions about the case:

(1) What would you say about Ted in answering this question? (Table II)

(2) If you were acquainted with the Dean at the other college, would this influence your approach to the inquiry? If so, how would it influence it? (Table III)

(3) If you received a general inquiry from this college asking, "We would appreciate any comments you can make in the nature of a general appraisal of the applicant's leadership, emotional adjustment and character," what would you say in reply? (Table IV)

Tables II, III, and IV report the responses of the Case of Ted and June. The differences in replies shown in Table II suggest varying interpretations of the extent to which the other institution should be given the full details. It should be noted that 5 deans would report some irregularity (Table II, category 1, d), yet also indicate that proof is not available. A more clear cut approach is suggested by the replies of 20 other deans (Table II, category 2). They suggest, by their approach, that the rules of evidence are important in this situation. The same approximate pattern of response is found by comparing Table II and Table IV.

TABLE II

THE APPRCACH OF 100 DEANS TO AN INQUIRY FROM ANOTHER INSTITUTION CONCERNING A TRANSFER STUDENT

(NOTE: The specific question in the inquiry was: "To your knowledge, has the applicant been involved in sexual irregularities?")

Response Categories		Number Replying	
(1)	Describes or reports the information in the case concerning June's accusation that Ted is the father of her unborn child:		
	(a) "I would report the incident. . .Tell the truth. . . give the full facts."	40	
	(b) "Yes, he was involved in one situation".	13	
	(c) "Yes, he was involved in an incident, but he left our institution before I could talk with him". . . .	8	
	(d) "Yes, he was involved in a situation. . .tell of the incident, but stress that this is hearsay information . . .Yes, but this was not proven".	5	
	(e) "Yes, he was involved, but I'd recommend him for admission to your institution".	1	
			67
(2)	Does not describe or report the information in the case concerning June's accusation:		
	(a) "I would tell nothing. . .I would refuse to answer this question.".	12	
	(b) "I have no first hand knowledge with respect to Ted's sexual life."	4	
	(c) "I would do nothing until I talked with Ted."	3	
	(d) "Just cite Ted's academic record and ignore the question regarding sex".	1	
			20
(3)	Implies Ted's involvement in "sexual irregularities", but does not report the information in the case:		
	(a) "I would suggest you (the other institution) talk with Ted concerning his record."	3	
	(b) "I question Ted's sense of responsibility".	1	
			4
(4)	Replies in terms of other considerations:		
	(a) "I would release information only with Ted's consent."	2	
	(b) "Refer the inquiry to the dean of women.".	1	
	(c) "I'd suggest the other college discipline Ted." . . .	1	
	(d) "If it isn't private information, I would not recommend Ted to the other institution."	1	
			5
	Total		96
	No Answers		4
			100

TABLE III

THE REPLIES OF 100 DEANS CONCERNING WHETHER OR NOT ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE DEAN AT ANOTHER INSTITUTION WOULD INFLUENCE THEIR APPROACH TO AN INQUIRY CONCERNING A TRANSFER STUDENT

Response Categories		Number Replying	
(1)	"No, it would not influence my approach to the inquiry . . .	61	
(2)	"Yes, it would influence my approach to the inquiry	34	
	Total		95
	No answers		5
			100

"If you answered 'yes' above, how would it influence your approach?"

The following responses were given by the 34 deans who answered, "Yes, it would influence my approach":

(1)	"I would write or call or contact the dean to explain the situation. . .I would call to give more details. . .I would be more candid".	26	
(2)	"Yes, but this would depend on the other dean. . . .Yes, it would depend on how well I knew the other dean--how much confidence I had in him.".	8	
			34

TABLE IV

THE APPROACH OF 100 DEANS TO A GENERAL INQUIRY FROM ANOTHER INSTITUTION CONCERNING A TRANSFER STUDENT

Response Categories			Number Replying	
(1)	Replies by questioning Ted's character, responsibility and/or emotional adjustment:			
	(a)	"I would question his character. . .I would say that he is immature and irresponsible. . .His emotional adjustment is open to question.".	25	
	(b)	"Yes, I would question his character and responsibility but I would talk with Ted first.".	3	
				28
(2)	Replies by citing incident with June described in the case:			
	(a)	"I would cite the facts of the incident. . .report the truth. . .".	17	
	(b)	"I would cite the facts of the incident with Ted's permission.".	3	
	(c)	"I would cite the facts of the case for one college owes this to another college.".	2	
	(d)	"I would give the facts but also suggest that the other college talk with Ted about it."	1	
				23

(Table continued on next page)

TABLE IV (continued)

Response Categories			Number Replying	
(3)	Replies by citing other aspects of Ted's record:			
	(a)	"I would give positive information about Ted--stress his academic record and extra-curricular participation."	11	
	(b)	"Ted can reenter our institution"	1	
				12
(4)	Replies by declining to answer the question:			
	(a)	"I would not reply to this question."	7	
	(b)	"I need more information to answer this question."	4	
	(c)	"I would first determine who was responsible for the incident before answering this question." . . .	1	
				12
(5)	Replies by citing incident in case but also refers to academic and/or non-academic record:			
	(a)	"Cite the facts of Ted's involvement with June but I would also stress his academic and extra-curricular record."	11	
				11
		Total		86
		No answers		14
				100

The replies to this case suggest that many deans regard the case material as appropriate information to report to another institution. On the other hand, some deans approach both the general and specific inquiry by declining to answer them; the information in the case is apparently either not pertinent to the inquiries or not adequate enough. Other deans, in stressing selected aspects of Ted's record --academic and extra-curricular--apparently feel that this information is more pertinent to the question of a student's eligibility for transfer than information with respect to alleged sexual behavior.

Case of Mike

> Mike was a 24 year old senior with prior military service in Korea. Academically he ranked in the upper 10% of his class. With the GI bill and considerable part time employment, he had managed to earn most of his college expenses.

During the first semester of his senior year, Mike and several other students were instrumental in petitioning for a student organization for the purpose of discussing Marxist ideology. In petitioning the faculty committee on student organizations, Mike and his friends had argued, "Students should have the opportunity to sample the full range of ideas and ideologies." After considerable debate, the faculty committee finally granted them a charter for one year's duration, to be reconsidered after that period. Alumni pressure against the organization was strong but later subsided after the organization was established, only to be renewed from time to time when the group invited "controversial" speakers to the campus.

The year after Mike graduated, it was established that the organization was, from its beginning, actually dominated by communists from outside the college. When this was determined the organization was immediately broken up. The names of those students petitioning for the organization and those subsequently joining it were recorded in your confidential file.

Four years after Mike graduated, you receive a telegram from the engineering division of a prominent aircraft firm which reads: "For our confidential use, please rush, reply, collect, pertinent information regarding this applicant such as verification of enrollment, date of degree, grade point average, also ability, character, and loyalty to the United States government."

The respondent was asked to answer the following questions about the case:

(1) What would you say in reply to this last portion of the telegram pertaining to Mike's loyalty to the United States Government? (Table V)

(2) Would the fact that you knew nothing about Mike's activities or record during the four years since he graduated influence your approach in answering the telegram? (Table VI)

(3) At your institution, would it be necessary to secure Mike's permission before releasing information with respect to his "grade point average" cited in the telegram? (Table VII)

(4) If an agent of the F. B. I. asked you about Mike's loyalty to the United States Government, what would you say? (Table VIII)

TABLE V

REPLIES OF 100 DEANS OF STUDENTS TO A WRITTEN INQUIRY PERTAINING TO A STUDENT'S LOYALTY TO THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Case of Mike (Question No. 1): "What would you say in reply to this last portion of the telegram pertaining to Mike's loyalty to the United States Government?"

Response Categories		Number Replying	
(1)	Replies by reporting Mike's participation in the student organization and/or mentions other considerations:		
	(a) "I would cite the full facts. . .tell them exactly what happened. . .report as honestly as I can.:	21	
	(b) "I would reply by giving the facts but I would suggest they fully investigate the whole matter."	11	
			32
(2)	Describes Mike as loyal, but then mentions Mike's participation in the organization and related information:		
	(a) "We have no evidence of disloyalty or proof of disloyalty, but he was involved in organization dominated by communists."	20	
			20
(3)	Does not directly judge Mike's loyalty or disloyalty but, instead, focuses on other considerations, such as:		
	(a) "I would like to know more than related here. . . Unless I had real evidence, I would say he is loyal . . .I have no basis upon which to judge Mike's loyalty.".	19	
	(b) "I would not answer this question" or "college policy would not permit me to comment".	4	
	(c) "I would release information only if Mike had chosen me as a reference.".	3	
			26
(4)	Focuses on aspects of Mike's record other than his association with the student organization:		
	(a) "I would refer to his successful military experience. . . While he helped organize a Marxist study club he was otherwise a satisfactory member of the University community.".	5	
			5
(5)	Replies by saying that Mike is loyal without citing his participation in the student organization:		
	(a) "I would say that Mike is loyal to best of my knowledge . . .I have no basis for questioning his loyalty. . . I know nothing of his political beliefs."	17	
			17
	Total		100

TABLE VI

REACTIONS OF 100 DEANS OF STUDENTS TO WHETHER OR NOT THE LACK OF SUBSEQUENT INFORMATION ABOUT A GRADUATE WOULD INFLUENCE THEIR APPROACH IN DEALING WITH AN INQUIRY PERTAINING TO THE GRADUATE'S LOYALTY

Case of Mike (Question No. 2): "Would the fact that you knew nothing about Mike's activities or record during the four years since he graduated influence your approach in answering the telegram? (Yes___) (No___) Why?"

Response Categories		Number Replying	
(1)	Replies to "Yes" or "No":		
	(a) "No, the lack of subsequent information would not influence my approach."	59	
	(b) "Yes, the lack of subsequent information would influence my approach."	38	
	(c) Did not answer "yes" or "no".	3	
	Total		100
(2)	Of the 59 who answered "no", 30 gave the following reasons:		
	(a) "I could only judge Mike on the basis of his college record. . .the record speaks for itself.".	17	
	(b) "Mike's subsequent record may change the whole picture."	8	
	(c) "I must tell the facts as I know them. . .Report the situation regardless of subsequent record.". . . .	3	
	(d) "The firm only wants what I know about Mike.". .	2	
			30
(3)	Of the 38 who answered "yes", 24 gave the following reasons:		
	(a) "Mike's subsequent record may change the whole picture. . .I don't know what happened during those four years.".	17	
	(b) "I could only rate Mike on the basis of his college record."	4	
	(c) "I would tell the facts as I knew them regardless of Mike's subsequent record."	2	
	(d) "This question should be asked of someone who knew Mike during the subsequent years."	1	
			24

TABLE VII

THE REPLIES OF 100 DEANS OF STUDENTS TO WHETHER OR NOT IT IS NECESSARY TO SECURE STUDENT PERMISSION IN RELEASING SCHOLASTIC STANDING TO A SOURCE OUTSIDE THE INSTITUTION[a]

Case of Mike (Question No. 3): "At your institution, would it be necessary to secure Mike's permission before releasing information with respect to his 'grade point average' cited in the above telegram? (Yes___) (No___) Why?"

(Table continued on next page)

TABLE VII (continued)

Response Categories		Number Replying	
(1)	"No, it would not be necessary to secure Mike's permission."	72	
(2)	"Yes, it would be necessary to secure Mike's permission."	18	
(3)	Did not answer "yes" or "no"	10	
		Total	100

[a]While 100 college and university staff--mostly deans of students--responded to the questionnaire, they are identified with 95 separate institutions. At one institution, 3 staff members replied; two staff members at each of three other institutions also replied to the questionnaire.

TABLE VIII

THE APPROACH OF 100 DEANS OF STUDENTS TO AN F.B.I. INQUIRY PERTAINING TO A STUDENT'S LOYALTY TO THE U. S. GOVERNMENT

Case of Mike (Question No. 4): "If an agent of the F.B.I. asked you about Mike's loyalty to the U. S. Government, what would you say?"

Response Categories			Number Replying	
	Number of replies to question		98	
	Number not replying		2	
			Total	100
(1)	Replies by citing Mike's record of association with student organization and/or does not affirm Mike's loyalty:			
	(a)	"Give all the facts of the situation. . .Cite the whole picture and leave the judgment up to the government."	58	
	(b)	"I have no evidence of disloyalty, but you should know that Mike was associated with a communist dominated student organization."	12	
	(c)	"Describe circumstances of Mike's association, yet it looks to me as if he was a victim of circumstance." (Respondent interprets possible meaning of record.)	8	
	(d)	"I would cite Mike's full record, but I would also stress his Korean War record and/or his academic record.	4	
				82
(2)	Responds by saying that there is no evidence of disloyalty and/or that he is not sure how to deal with the inquiry:			
	(a)	"I'm not sure. . .it would depend on what else I knew. . .it would depend on my knowledge of the situation."	9	
	(b)	"Mike is loyal to the best of my knowledge. . .I have no evidence of disloyalty regarding Mike." . .	7	
				16
			Total	98
			No answers	2
				100

In comparing Table V and VIII the replies of 40 deans to the written inquiry from the aircraft firm reflect the view that Mike's record is irrelevant to the question of loyalty. Only 16 replies reflect this view in dealing with the F. B. I. inquiry. A possible conclusion is that there is apparently less need to evaluate the relevancy of the student information in approaching the F. B. I. inquiry than in approaching the business inquiry. Conversely, more deans feel that the full elements of the student record should be reported to the F. B. I. than to the aircraft firm.

It is possible to only speculate concerning whether or not the deans, in approaching this case, considered the role of the college in encouraging free discussion of diverse ideas among the student community. The replies of the minority may reflect a concern for this issue. One dean identified the issue in this way:

> If I felt he (Mike) was expressing his right to deal with controversial ideas (rather than conspire) I would state so very strongly!

Case of Harry

> Harry is a graduating senior who has achieved a "B" average in business administration and economics. During his four years at your institution, he has not participated in any extra-curricular activities and, on several occasions, has been openly hostile when invited to assist in college-wide activities. You receive an inquiry (in writing) from one of the leading business firms in the country asking for your comments with respect to Harry's character, ability, and potential for employment in this firm. One of the specific questions in the letter is: "Please comment concerning the applicant's ability to get along well with others as you have observed him in extra-curricular activities at your college."

The respondent was asked to answer the following questions about the case:

(1) How would you answer this question--that is, what would you actually say in reply? (Table IX)

(2) Of the inquiries from outside sources you deal with in your work, how often do you receive inquiries about students about whom very little student record

information is available (as in this situation)? (Table X)

TABLE IX

REPLIES OF 100 DEANS OF STUDENTS TO AN INQUIRY FROM A BUSINESS FIRM CONCERNING A STUDENT'S ABILITY TO GET ALONG WITH OTHERS AS REFLECTED IN EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Case of Harry (Question No. 1): "How would you answer this question: 'Please comment concerning the applicant's ability to get along well with others as you have observed him in extra-curricular activities at your college.'--that is, what would you actually say in reply?"

Response Category			Number Replying	
(1)	Replies that Harry has not participated in extra-curricular activities:			
	(a)	Cites fact of non-participation and also mentions Harry's reluctance and/or hostility to participate	25	
	(b)	Just cites the fact that Harry has not participated	17	
				42
(2)	Replies that Harry has not participated, but mentions other factors:			
	(a)	Comments on Harry's character and ability, in both a positive and negative way--information which is, for the most part, not included in the case.	26	
	(b)	Refers to Harry's academic record with the observation that it is a good record	13	
				39
(3)	Does not focus on Harry's non-participation in extra-curricular activities but, instead, judges Harry:			
	(a)	"He's too self centered.".	3	
	(b)	"Harry has apparent difficulty getting along with others.".	1	
				4
(4)	Responds by declining to comment on Harry's ability to get along with others and/or refers to Harry's lack of participation:			
	(a)	"I do not know. . . We have no record. . . I have had no opportunity to observe Harry's ability to get along with others.".	13	
				13
		Total		98
		No answers		2
				100

TABLE X

THE FREQUENCY WITH WHICH 100 DEANS OF STUDENTS RECEIVE INQUIRIES FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES PERTAINING TO STUDENTS ABOUT WHOM VERY LITTLE RECORD INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE

Case of Harry (Question No. 3): "Of the inquiries from outside sources you deal with in your work, how often do you receive inquiries about students about whom very little student record information is available (as in this situation)?"

Response Categories		Number Replying	
(1)	Sometimes	45	
(2)	Often	34	
(3)	Seldom	19	
(4)	Never[a]	2	
	Total		100

[a]One of the two deans replying "never" added the comment that his records are "excellent".

The practices reflected in the replies to the case of Harry suggest that, for the majority of respondents, the case information is pertinent to the inquiries. However, a minority of deans apparently feel that a student's ability to get along with others is irrelevant to the question of participation in organized student life.

Issues and Recommended Practices

The data obtained through the questionnaire and interviews provided a basis for the identification of issues with respect to the colleges' task in dealing with inquiries. These issues, and their implications, are presented in the form of recommended practices--practices which should not be viewed as conclusive principles but rather as points of reference or guidelines to aid institutions in assessing their own procedures and policies.

a/ Colleges and Universities Should Critically Review Their Student Record System As It Relates to Dealing with Inquiries

Policies for collecting and recording information about students within the institution should take into account the task of dealing with outside inquiries. While student records are needed to understand and assist the student during his collegiate experience, the use of this information in response to outside inquiries often

requires the application of different criteria. It appears that few institutions have deleted needless, and often irrelevant, information from their student records, nor does the literature of student personnel work reflect a concern that this be accomplished.

Moreover, the findings of this study suggest that both the comprehensive student information collected and the diverse inquiries received may tend to obscure the need for selectivity and critical judgment in the use of this information.

(v) Distinctions Need to Be Made Between the Public and Private Aspects of the Student Record

The findings suggest that quite diverse and comprehensive aspects of the student's record--personality, character, conduct, and other personal information --are considered appropriate for release in response to inquiries.

Clear distinctions between student information for internal consumption and that which may be appropriately released should be made as student record procedures are reviewed or preferably as they are instituted. Often, judgments regarding the meaning of student life during the undergraduate years are not appropriate guidelines for interpreting the student in response to inquiries--particularly, inquiries received after the student graduates. Specific procedures for the periodic destruction of information and the regular evaluation of its current significance would further reduce the chances that essentially "private" information would be inappropriately released. Responsible institutional practice requires clearly defined and well-publicized statements with respect to the public and private areas of the student record. The consequences of such definitions of policy might be that the college, the student, and agencies outside the institution would be more realistically insured of their respective rights and obligations in relation to the question of student inquiries.

Interpreting, Rather than Reporting Information, is Essential to Good Practice

The data of the study suggest that an important consideration for practice is whether student information is interpreted or merely reported in dealing with inquiries. Deans who "report the facts", "tell the truth", or "fully cooperate", in dealing with inquiries imply, by their position, that it is the responsibility of the inquirer to evaluate the meaning of the information released. As one dean explained:

> All through your questionnaire you are raising the question of whether I shall evaluate the significance of the record or whether the inquirer shall evaluate the significance of the record. Now, in the case of the academic record, we simply let the inquirer do the judging. Is not the behavioral record similar? We must give facts--in addition, if we have opinions and conclusions, we have a responsibility to include them.

A preferable approach is indicated by those deans and other staff who are reluctant to deal with certain inquiries, who comment that information cited about the student is not pertinent to the inquiry, or who refer, for example, to the need for subsequent information about a student who has graduated several years prior to the time when the inquiry is received. These deans consider it their function, rather than that of the inquirer, to first judge the significance of the record (before dealing with an inquiry). In doing so, their approach reflects a concern for the colleges' obligation to student.

(4) Each Inquiry Should Be Evaluated in Terms of Its Relevancy to Available Information about the Student

The questionnaire results indicate that some respondents generally overlooked the fact that available information about the student may not be pertinent to the specific content of the inquiry.

In terms of ethically sound practice, the release of irrelevant information, the tendency to generalize and assume meanings which do not exist both in the

student record and the inquiry, again underscores the need to carefully assess whether or not each inquiry is clearly relevant in terms of exactly what is known about the student. If it is irrelevant, the request for information should be declined.

The integrity of the institution and the welfare of the student depend on the extent to which only verified, factual information is released. The rules of evidence --criteria for determining the veracity of the person reporting information about the student, and for distinguishing between rumor, gossip, secondhand information and factual, firsthand, verified information--are an important instrument for facilitating the college's responsibility to all concerned.

(5) Specific Information About the Purposes of the Inquiry and Possible Uses of Information Released are Essential to Good Practice

Just as inferences and assumptions about the meaning of student data are inimical to good practice, neither should those who deal with inquiries presume that the purposes of the inquiries are, in every instance, what they appear to be.

Judgments with respect to the possible fitness of a student or former student for employment in a particular firm often require a detailed knowledge of the specific skills and requirements of the position in question. While student scholastic achievement may be clearly related to certain criteria for fitness in a particular job, a far less clear relationship exists between the student's record of extra-curricular participation, or record of involvement in disciplinary situations, and potential for successful employment.

Personal inquiries, such as information sought in person by an employer representative or government agent, offer a better chance for the college to assess the actual and possible ways in which student information will be utilized outside the institution. However, the position of certain government agencies that it is not

their function to evaluate information secured might well be cause for a more critical and cautious approach in dealing with inquiries from these agencies.

(6) Students Should be Involved in Policies and Practices with Respect to the External Use of Information and the Formulation of Policy for Dealing with Inquiries

It is paradoxical that the student is often encouraged to participate in building and maintaining his undergraduate record; yet, according to the findings of this study and a survey of the literature, he is generally not consulted about inquiries received about him or institutional practices in this area.

In the writer's view, students are often unsure as to the exact purposes and possible uses of their student personnel or academic records. Consequently, an important area of student concern is not being used for potentially educative purposes.

While it is impractical to consult the student with respect to each inquiry received, it is important that student permission, in many instances, be secured before information is released— particularly information which the student may not have known exists in his record and is considered public information by his institution. Again, colleges are legally justified in collecting information about students consistent with the educational functions of the institution. Ethically, however, the release of this information for purposes about which the student may not have full knowledge imposes a serious responsibility upon the college or university.

The situation of the student who seeks a personal recommendation or otherwise grants permission for the interpretation of his record, is quite different from that of the student about whom an inquiry is received without his knowledge. The data indicate that, in many instances, student permission is apparently assumed

by the college staff person dealing with inquiries where, in fact, such permission does not exist.

On a broader level, there are other reasons for student involvement in questions of institutional policy and practice. Student participation offers educative benefits for the student and the institution with the consequence that the atmosphere of freedom and cooperation is strengthened between the student and his college.

(1) Institutional Policy is Preferable to Personal Judgment As a Basis for Practice

Forty deans indicated that their responses to the questionnaire were based on personal judgments; 44 based their replies on both personal judgment and institutional policy.

Well defined policies subject to periodic review by responsible committees and based on the judgments of both students and staff, offer several advantages. Such policies and the premises upon which they rest may be circulated and publicized among the institutional community, thereby serving to clarify this aspect of the student-college relationship. Statements of policy may also serve to define the college-inquirer relationship with the result that an inquirer would know what information can or cannot be expected from the institution.

Responsibility for the formulation of policy should evolve from study and consideration by a committee composed of both faculty and administrative personnel, whose task it is to deal with inquiries, and a representative group of students. A review of existing practices should provide the basis for developing guidelines.

The periodic review of policy would provide for needed flexibility as changes occur in the definition of institutional objectives, administrative organization, composition and characteristics of the student body, and other factors.

Changes in policy should, in turn, be publicized for all concerned.

Should a college or university see no need for formal institutional policy, it still has the obligation to inform students and those making inquiries of the criteria used for dealing with inquiries.

(4) Policies and Practices for Interpreting the Student Have Important Implications for the Student-College Relationship

In terms of the issues and considerations outlined above, the role of the college or university in interpreting its students involves important implications for the quality of the student-college relationship--student morale, attitudes toward the institution, and understanding its purposes.

Practices for dealing with inquiries may serve to define standards of student behavior and the quality of the student's participation in the life of the institutional community. Unfortunately, there is some indication that practices may serve as instruments controlling student life. Whether or not this is an appropriate purpose or consequence of student records and their use is a question needing serious consideration by the college and university.

Evidence that students are unsure as to how their records are used and, in some instances, concerned about how their records may affect their future, further suggests an important relationship between practices and the student's perceptions and attitudes about his college experience. One of the more disquieting findings of the study is suggested by the number of deans who treat, as public information, a record of past student disciplinary involvement despite the fact that the student was subsequently restored to good standing.

The use of information about students should serve to facilitate student freedom, not inhibit a desire to explore diverse areas of inquiry and association, and

increase the possibility that students will resist those norms which tend to reduce individuality.

The student's experience is more likely to be characterized by these conditions in institutions where: (1) the record is interpreted rather than reported; (2) the student is consulted and involved in policies and practices for the use of his record; (3) distinctions are made between the public and private, significant and insignificant, pertinent and irrelevant, outdated and current information as it is interpreted to those outside the institution.

The practices of a small, yet significant, minority of deans and other staff participating in the study reflect a concern for these considerations. For this reason, their practices and views underscore an approach to inquiries which should be more widely adopted by college and universities, particularly if the student-college relationship is to be characterized by a sense of responsibility and freedom which will best prepare the student for his role as a responsible citizen.